

COMMENTARY

THREE WEEKS IN CAIRO

A Journalist in Quest of Egypt's Terms for Peace

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BEIRUT, LEBANON

I HAVE just come out of Cairo after a three weeks' stay in Egypt. At the beginning, I was able to find and interrogate a number of objective observers, track down certain opponents of the Nasser regime and win their confidence, even have some good talks with various government officials and three cabinet ministers—two of them members of the Revolutionary Command Council, the small group of young officers that kicked King Farouk out in 1952 and has been directing Egypt's affairs ever since. But then, suddenly, heavy-footed agents of Military Intelligence began to intervene. It appears that Cairo had me ticketed as a "Zionist." Or, more loosely, as an enemy of Egypt.

As a result, I was unable to reach Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser and obtain from him

what I was seeking: an off-the-record, frank, but authoritative disclosure of Egypt's true minimum requirements for a settlement with Israel. Naively, I see now, I had believed it was possible to get such a statement, and by publishing it just like that (though without in any way naming the source of the statement), perhaps contribute a little toward the settlement itself. As things turned out, I was probably the only one, among several dozen foreign correspondents in Cairo during the month, *not* to have been received by Nasser.

But my private difficulties and frustrations in getting the story I was after, which had subdued echoes in several embassies, provided the material of another story that is worth telling in its own right for the light it throws on the mind and temper of the present rulers of Egypt.

HAL LEHRMAN's on-the-spot report from Cairo follows up George Lichtheim's more general survey of the situation in Egypt which appeared in our previous number ("Nationalism, Revolution, and Fantasy in Egypt"). Mr. Lehrman hardly needs an introduction to the readers of COMMENTARY. Today one of the most authoritative journalists writing on Middle Eastern and Jewish affairs, he first made his reputation as a foreign correspondent in Central and Eastern Europe right after the war. His article "Morocco's Jews Between Islam and France" appeared in November 1955. Mr. Lehrman is also active as a lecturer.

DAN OLEXIW, the American Embassy's information officer, had announced my presence in Cairo to Lieutenant Colonel Abdul Kader Hatem, who is Director of Information in the Ministry of National Guidance and, as such, an official Egyptian spokesman. Olexiw described me, it seems, as an experienced correspondent with a tendency to report things fairly. The Colonel was sufficiently impressed to invite me to call on him, and kept me waiting only thirty-

five minutes, which is better than par in the debonair Middle East. Hatem materialized as a round man, aged thirty-seven, wearing a brush mustache and neat business suit, and wedged into his desk amid four telephones, a massive office inter-com, and a giant push-button radio.

He offered me an American cigarette, a bottle of Coca-Cola, and the deference due a Very Important Person, at the same time volunteering the information that he held a doctorate in political science from an English university. Modestly, he did not tell me that it was he who had concocted the triumphant Egyptian "counter-attack" at Sabha early in November in which "some three hundred Israeli aggressors had been slain." (To explain why not a single enemy corpse could be produced in evidence of this victory, he had let it be known that every Israeli soldier had had a hooked tow-line attached to the back of his belt with which his body could be pulled off the battlefield.)

Collier's had asked me to do a piece, from both sides of the "front," about two ordinary soldiers, one Egyptian, the other Israeli, the background of each, his daily routine, the things he thought he was fighting for, and so on. Naturally, I said nothing to Hatem about the Israeli half of this assignment. (Because Arab League countries usually bar any traveler whose passport betrays an intention of visiting Israel, I had my Israeli visa in a belt next to my skin.) Did the Colonel think a sympathetic portrait of the embattled Egyptian G.I., with photographs, would be in order? He did, enthusiastically. Would he facilitate my going to some part of the frontier, not to see military emplacements, but to meet such a soldier? That would be a bit difficult, but it could and would be arranged. Yes, he would arrange an interview with the Commander-in-Chief, General Abdel Hakim Amer. Would it perhaps even be possible, for insertion in a well-framed box inside the G.I. story, to obtain a 500-word statement, signed by Prime Minister Nasser, entitled "Why Egypt Is Arming"? A most excellent and feasible idea. (I did not add that I would have to ask

Prime Minister David Ben Gurion for a statement of equal length on "Why Israel Is Arming.") Hatem suggested that for the Nasser statement I would have to see "Gamal" himself. I replied that I would like nothing better, especially since I had an additional assignment, from the *Reporter*, for a critical survey of the Egyptian revolution's progress to date. Moreover, I had a letter of introduction to Nasser from his great and good friend, Mustapha Ben Halim, the Prime Minister of Libya, whom I had interviewed in Tripoli a week before.

In connection with the *Reporter* story, I went on, I had already been received cordially by several officials concerned with internal Egyptian affairs. Would the Colonel, however, please try to arrange a meeting with the Interior Minister, Lieutenant Colonel Zakaria Mokhialdin, who did not ordinarily see correspondents? The Director of Information certainly would. And a trip to Gaza to talk with Palestinian refugees? Just as soon as enough correspondents had applied to justify assigning a plane, he pledged. He called in an assistant. This is Gamal Rashid, said Hatem. He will arrange everything for you.

THAT was on a Monday. I kept very busy with my own devices for two days, during which there was only silence from the Directorate of Information. Late on Wednesday I phoned Rashid. There was a long list of correspondents waiting to see the Prime Minister, but my name was on top. Good. On Friday Rashid notified me that I would be permitted to see the Interior Minister the next morning, as promised.

Possibly my woes began with that encounter. The Interior Minister, another thirty-seven-year-old, is the Nasser regime's chief policeman, jailer, and counter-spy. He knew already, from Hatem, that it was to be an informal conversation, not an interview. When we sat down, I stressed again that my purpose was to understand his attitudes. He agreed to this. So I felt free to ask him questions.

They were questions which nobody, ap-

parently, had put to this formidable young man before: about the permanent police guard at the University, the delay in producing a constitution (just recently announced), the number of political prisoners, the justification for the censorship, his concepts of government, his personal training for his present occupation, his experiences in the "Palestine War." (I should explain that my questions, in all such conversations with high Egyptian officials, were not put challengingly. They were, however, intended to elicit something more than stock responses. Any other method of interviewing would have been a waste of time.) His replies, though guarded, revealed the man. I went away satisfied. (Much later, I learned that he had immediately telephoned a full account of our talk to Hatem.)

That afternoon Rashid told me that the meeting with General Amer, the search for the G.I., the Nasser "by-liner," the trip to Gaza all depended on my interview with Nasser, whose approval was needed. Hatem was "working on it." Unhappily, the Prime Minister was busy, which I did not doubt. At noon the next day, as a result of a direct approach by phone which I had made earlier in the week, I was received by Lieutenant Colonel Anwar al Sadat, again aged thirty-seven, Minister of State, head of the Islamic Congress, infantry battalion buddy of Mokhialdin, and army camp comrade of Nasser.

This pontiff of pan-Islam in a brown sports jacket jolted me by amiably disclosing right off that he had been responsible for the assassination of a pro-British Egyptian leader in 1946, and had organized a murder society to liquidate others holding like treasonable views. In turn, I jolted him by mildly inquiring if he still considered assassination an honorable political means. Naturally, he did not, and grew hot trying to prove why it would be a sin to shoot *this* government. My eyes wide with innocence, I put further queries about internal and external policies, to which his responses grew increasingly turgid, and even slightly mad. By the time we had finished Sadat's eyes were rolling around in his head.

I shall probably never know for sure whether our conversation was the cause or effect of my "Zionist" dossier. According to one report, Intelligence had rung through to Sadat with word of my guilt just before I arrived at his office. (When a correspondent comes to Cairo, this informant said, Intelligence starts to read through everything he has written; the alleged call was the result of these researches.) According to another report, Sadat had phoned Hatem as soon as I was out of the room, saying in effect: Who the hell is this man? Investigate him. . . . (Or it may be that a certain person known to be out of favor with the regime had been seen slipping onto a bench by the moonlit Nile that evening and volunteering an earful to me about ways and means of staging a guaranteed successful counter-revolution. Or, as some of my friends thought—without hard evidence—that a certain "friendly" embassy had warned Hatem against me. Such is the atmosphere in freedom-loving Cairo.) At any rate, the fact is that a change in Hatem became visible the day after the Sadat talk. Until then, it might have been possible to attribute his failure to make good his promises to regional torpor. But thereafter it was just malevolence, thinly disguised.

THE new phase was inaugurated by an urgent invitation from Hatem on Monday morning to "come in and we'll arrange everything." It was exactly one week since his first commitment to arrange everything—with one important interview as the net result. Again the American cigarette and the bottle of Coca-Cola. Did I have with me the letter from the Libyan Prime Minister to the Egyptian Prime Minister? I handed it over. He read it broodingly. Then: "It says here that you are a friend of the Arab people. If you decide to write anything unfriendly about us, will you let me have the letter before you leave?" To this I answered: "There's a much easier way to get the letter. Just allow me to deliver it to the person to whom it is addressed." Yes, of course, said Hatem, but, as you know, the Prime Minister is very busy. Then he tried an equally

droll approach: "If you write anything bad, will you show it to me?" My eyes crossed at that one: "Are you suggesting that you want to control what I file?" No, no, Hatem said hurriedly. "We have no censorship in Egypt. The members of our government have nothing to hide. And they always speak the truth. But they are very busy people. Sometimes they do not take the time to express their thoughts clearly, or to obtain the correct information. I am the spokesman for all. What I meant to say was that if there is anything you do not understand, come to me and I will give you satisfactory explanations."

Well then, I said, would he explain why, although he had approved the Egyptian G.I. project, I was getting no cooperation? "It is a technical difficulty," he said. "You have to go by plane to get to the military zone. All the planes are just now being used for training. Only the Prime Minister could order one. But first you must speak with him, and unfortunately he is still very busy." And what about the visit to the Gaza refugees? "There is a train," he countered slyly. "It would take ten, maybe twelve hours each way. You would have to stay two full days in Gaza until you got a train back. Would you like me to get a ticket for you?" I would not. But I kept on smiling. We smiled at each other as he ushered me out.

That same day I received confirmation from two different sources that I was in disgrace; in the few remaining days before I quit Egypt, I had it from three more sources, none of which was an official one, but all in a position to know. Their accounts differed only on the nature of the "grievance" against me. If I was being ostracized for Zionism, why had Paul Sann of the *New York Post*, regarded in Cairo as a Zionist incarnate, been favored recently by Nasser with a long *tête-à-tête*? The explanation, I was told, was that Nasser had been earnestly trying to convince him! But then the ingrate had gone off and written a long unfriendly story, which had been reproduced by Reuters around the world—and this had spoiled things for me! It was reported that the Nasserites expected I would "probably" find

some evidence damaging to the regime, but it was calculated that my one-sided account of conditions in Egypt would expose my rank prejudice and nullify the effect my story might otherwise have on readers. Though they were not going to throw me out or stop me from getting whatever information I could, they certainly weren't going to help me in any way.

I must admit there was something nice about their allowing me to tarry in Cairo after all this. The boneheadedness lay in their conclusion that, because my past writing had reviewed *both* sides of the Arab-Israeli argument, or because my recent conversations had revealed less than total acceptance of Egyptian assertions, *ergo* I must be their implacable foe. Their definition left no room for complexity or nuance.

It is hardly the most agreeable of sensations to be a suspected "enemy alien." The last time I had experienced this was behind the Iron Curtain in 1945-46. But I had many other co-sufferers then. All correspondents—in fact all Westerners, including diplomats—were getting the same iron-jawed handling from the Red Army and the local Communists in Budapest, Bucharest, and the other "liberated" capitals. In Cairo, I was entirely alone. Even the American Embassy offered only aloof sympathy.

I was impressed by the general belief in Cairo that the secret police was omniscient. I had been advised, from the start, that every correspondent's lodgings were searched as a routine thing. Parts of my seven hundred pages of loose-leaf notes on my five months in North Africa and two weeks in Egypt could be interpreted unpleasantly. I took precautions to recognize the hands of intruders: books tilted at certain angles, neckties draped over my papers, and so forth. To avoid compromising the people I was seeing, I gave shadowers a hard time by dodging in and out of buses and taxis. The night after the Hatem talk, I even kept my balcony windows barred. As it turned out, all this was silly: the neckties lay exactly where I had left them; the police shadow did not exist.

After twenty-four hours I began to see the funny side of my plight. Every morning in that final week, I made application to somebody for my Nasser interview. I began with Nasser himself, wiring him a deferential message stating my affiliations, assignments, and desire to transmit the respects of the Libyan Prime Minister. The telegram was intercepted by a palace guard, and landed on Hatem's desk. I dug up the unlisted phone number of the Prime Minister's personal aide, one Ali Sabri, and addressed a petition to him. I phoned Wing Commander Hassan Ibrahim, Minister of National Production, who also acted as Nasser's majordomo. To one Salah el Shahad, in charge of Nasser's appointment book, I read a riot act about the dubious protocol in refusing to receive a missive from the head of a friendly state (Libya). Stammerings, awkward silences, unfulfilled promises to consult and call back.

One evening Nasser had seven correspondents at his home for a two-hour talk: three Swiss, two Italians, a Greek, and a Turk—all of them newer in Cairo than I. When I chided Hatem the next day for having overlooked me, he said blandly that it was a strictly European group: "As an American, you would have felt out of place." To show his "sincerity," he offered me two opera tickets. I surprised him by taking them, and spent an agreeable evening. He also suddenly offered me an automobile for my appointments around and outside Cairo. I told him I preferred an airplane to Gaza.

I learned that a dozen foreign reporters were being alerted for a trip there. I waited until they had flown off on a Saturday morning, and then maliciously phoned Hatem to find out what his answer would be to this one. He did not flinch. "You see, those chaps are interested just in the refugees up there. But you also want to see the army. I was afraid you would insist on this at Gaza, and the security officer in charge would answer back sharply, and there might be an incident. . . ."

Sunday, having completed my investigations without benefit of Hatem, I departed

at last for the Lebanon. The contrast was a bit heady between Cairo, where the press slavishly obeys government orders even as to the size of the headlines to run above the texts of official handouts, and Beirut, where more than twenty newspapers insult the cabinet daily.

THE present government of Egypt knows only one adversary: Zionism. This is hardly news, but the intensity, the scale, the exclusiveness of this concentration on Israel has perhaps not been stressed enough.

Cairo is plastered with recruiting posters. Each shows an idealized Egyptian soldier in heroic attitude, confronting a squadron of hostile planes, or attacking an enemy gun. The guns and the planes, inevitably, are Israeli. On Liberation Square, the army operates a miniature firing range where passers-by—mostly boys of high school age—are given "rifle instruction" with toylike air guns that shoot pellets. The little bull's-eye targets, I gathered, represented "Zionists." Your conversations—with chance acquaintances, in private homes, in government offices—are inexorably swung around to Palestine and Western "responsibility" for its loss. Three out of every five editorials, and at least half the foreign news dispatches, revolve around the Jewish state. The press tries to give an impression of objectivity by occasionally carrying an Israeli dateline. But such "news" from Tel Aviv or Jewish Jerusalem is never given whole. Always, it reports a few words out of context from a belligerent Israeli declaration, or some index of economic hardship, or an item about an increase in population, in cultivated land—or in military toughness. Sedulously, Egyptians are taught to see Israel as a menace, and the only menace. A year before Partition, when I was last in Cairo, the average Egyptian was clearly apathetic to the Arab League's tirades against Zionism. Today the Jewish "threat" is really believed, and to an extent which makes even those who invented the myth its prisoner. Israel has become a national mania in Egypt.

A mania for everyone except the political

sophisticates, the comparative handful of enlightened spirits who are more depressed by the number of inmates in Egypt's jails than beguiled by the regime's over-advertised economic and social reforms. To this group, Nasser's Czechoslovak arms coup was less significant as a provocation to Israel or an invitation to the Soviets than for the puerility of the West's reaction. Everybody expected an Anglo-American *riposte*. No one knew quite what the West *could* do, but obviously it was going to be earth-shaking. When the West merely wept and wailed, and sent its diplomats racing around in airplanes, Egyptians in street, office, and uniform were astounded—and then delighted. The Nasser dictatorship stands reinforced today, not because it may have strengthened Egyptian defense, but because it has thumbed its nose at the West and gotten away with it.

The anti-regime liberals believe the Israel issue important only as fuel for Nasser's popularity and an encouragement to Egypt's suicidal leaning toward the East. But such critics are totally unrepresentative, unorganized, and unable to raise their voices above a mutter. For most Egyptian opinion—even in presumably thoughtful government circles—Israel is the center and circumference of the nation's problems. All other considerations—internal development, foreign alliances, relations with East and West—are secondary.

This view, in all its impregnable simplicity, was given me ready-made aboard a Mistr plane on the way to Cairo from Tripoli. The navigation officer (hence a man of considerable training and some education) put the ship on its course and then came aft for a chat. First he explained that Israel had been enabled to seize Palestine by a combination of Western and native treachery: "The Zionists won by tricks. Truman's UN forced us to accept cease-fires every time we had them on the run; meanwhile, he supplied them with arms; our arms were bought through Farouk and the pashas, who wanted to make money rather than defend the fatherland; instead of shooting forward, those

guns shot backward, killing Egyptians instead of Zionists; so we lost the war.

"Nasser threw out the traitors. He began to make our people and our country strong by internal reforms. The Zionists wanted to prevent this. They started trouble on the border. Every day they attacked. Nasser decided we must have arms to protect ourselves. At least we needed as much arms as the Zionists have. Nasser turned to the Americans. They said they would give us the weapons, but first Egypt must make an alliance with them. Why should Egyptians fight in Turkey or Siberia? The place for Egyptian troops is in Egypt, to hold our frontiers. Nasser refused guns on these terms as a gift. He wanted to pay for them. The Americans set impossible prices. They tried to take all our dollar reserves, which would leave us weaker instead of stronger. Nasser was desperate. Then the Russians offered us arms. No gifts, but honest trade, at low prices, in exchange for our rice and cotton—and without any political conditions. We accepted. Now the United States is rushing to give more guns to the Zionists so they can continue to attack us without fear. This will only compel us to do more and more business with the Russians. How far are the Americans trying to push us toward Moscow?"

Less crudely, but with essentially the same interpretations and conclusions, one gets the same analysis at high government levels, including the cabinet. Here, pieced together from my conversations with three ministers and a half-dozen correspondents who had seen Nasser, is the composite Egyptian case on the Western "refusal" to help Egypt towards adequate "self-defense":

The Czech arms deal came only after years of disillusionment elsewhere. First, an American Under Secretary of Defense visiting Cairo had indicated readiness to make equipment available. On the strength of this, an Egyptian military mission headed by Nasser's close friend Ali Sabri had gone to Washington, only to return empty-handed. In those days the British and Egyptians were at each other's throats over Suez. London

was pressing Washington not to give the Egyptians arms to use against British soldiers. Washington promised Cairo satisfaction *after* a settlement with the British. So the Egyptians waited, for two years.

Then came the Anglo-Egyptian Suez base agreement. The Americans now agreed to give Egypt some economic aid. But they said that if Egypt wanted arms she would have to sign a mutual-aid pact. Nasser understood that every country receiving American arms had to sign such a pact, that it was not an alliance, that it did not violate Egyptian sovereignty, that Egypt could cancel it at any time, and that the military mission accompanying the arms was merely to insure their proper maintenance and use. But, he explained to the Americans, the Egyptian people would not understand all this. After seventy years, Egypt was finally getting rid of the British. It would look to the Egyptian people as if Nasser were simply replacing them with Americans and himself becoming an American stooge, just as prime ministers before him had been British stooges. Give me time to educate the people, Nasser pleaded. Don't ask me to sign anything called "mutual security." In the meanwhile, let me buy arms.

There was an arrangement dating back to the Farouk period, still valid, by which Egypt could purchase arms from the United States on condition they were not used aggressively or transferred without American authorization. The Americans accordingly requested a list of desired items. These were surplus, which the United States customarily sold at give-away prices. Washington pondered and pondered. Finally it offered to sell Egypt \$27,000,000 worth of arms, which was exactly the amount of free dollars in Egypt's possession. Even then, it would take two years to deliver. The Egyptians suggested being permitted to use some of the \$40,000,000 assigned them in the economic aid program, but the Americans said no, the Congressional act did not allow diversion of economic funds to military purposes. Then Cairo asked to be allowed to pay in sterling. The Americans studied this prob-

lem at great length. Infinite delays and legal obfuscations—all proving that the real obstacle was America's commitment to Zionism. And this despite Washington's sure knowledge that Israel's armed strength was superior to Egypt's, and the indisputable fact that, in view of Israel's obvious intention, "every bullet for Israel means one dead Arab."

The British and French were no better (the Egyptian argument continues). Nasser noticed that the French were selling tanks to Israel which they would not sell to Egypt. When asked why not, the French "explained" that the tanks were British tanks being trans-shipped. The French were willing to sell tanks and planes of their own to Egypt, but could not promise delivery before late 1955 and 1956. Long before then, the same French models were being exhibited in Israeli military shows. Is it any wonder that, when the Czech offer of free sale on easy terms came along, the Egyptians were gratified? Even then, Nasser gave the West another chance. "When I told Mr. Byroade (United States Ambassador Henry A. Byroade)," Nasser reminisced to correspondents, "he smiled. He thought I was bluffing. . . ."

WHY does Egypt need large-scale armaments at all? Because, according to the Egyptian view one encounters no matter how high one inquires, Israel is an expansionist power. Is not the legend "from the Nile to the Euphrates" inscribed on the walls of the Knesset in Jerusalem? And did not Israel attack Egypt brutally, without warning in February of 1955?

This February 28 attack on Egyptian positions in the Gaza strip is the keystone of Cairo's anti-Israeli argument. Until then, it is contended, Nasser was standing out against his colleagues and advisors and arguing that Israel was not a threat—or at least not sufficiently one to divert Egypt's attention from internal development. In a speech to his brother officers several months earlier, Nasser had even served flat notice that he intended to spend Egypt's meager funds

not on guns, but on schools, roads, hospitals, and dams. As a result, Gaza had been garrisoned by only a small force, no combat troops, no trenches, not even barbed wire. When the Israelis struck, there was nothing to stop them. Strong units advanced two miles into Egyptian territory, destroyed a military post and a water-pumping station, bombed a civilian home, and ambushed a military truck, killing thirty-eight people. Nasser felt these deaths were his fault. Yet he did not retaliate, but took Egypt's grievance to the UN. Nor did he react when Ben Gurion publicly congratulated the officers who participated in the Gaza attack, or when Ben Gurion told the Knesset that, since Israel could not get peace by negotiation, he would get peace for her by force. All the world heard Ben Gurion, Menahem Beigin, and other "responsible" politicians campaign in last summer's Israeli elections on platforms of violence. Still Nasser did not turn to Russia, though by then he knew Czech arms were there for the asking. He kept on pleading for American arms. In August, however, he learned that the Gaza attack had been the decision, not merely of one fanatical minister acting on his own initiative, but of the entire Israeli cabinet. Only then, six months after the Gaza attack, did Nasser resolve to cross the Rubicon to Prague.

For whatever it is worth, it should be noted that Western diplomatic representatives I met in Cairo unanimously agreed with the Egyptian view of the Gaza incident's crucial importance. On the other hand, virtually nobody accepted the theory of voracious Israeli "imperialism." After touring the Arab capitals, American information chief Theodore Streibert searched earnestly—and unsuccessfully, of course—to find the Niles-to-Euphrates pledge on the Israeli parliament's walls; he surely picked up that canard from the Arabs, not from any diplomatic observers. The most the latter will concede to the argument of an Israeli "threat" is that they can understand how the Arabs might have mesmerized themselves into believing it. When explaining Nasser's

switch toward the Soviets, they tend to give partial credit to Egypt's urgent need of customers for her cotton in the face of possible large-scale American dumping. But they do believe, emphatically, that Gaza itself is the overriding reason for the hysteria about Israel. It was so, they say, because of the Egyptian army's reaction to the Israeli attacks, and its consequent pressure on Nasser.

The absence of effective defense at Gaza may or may not have revealed the innocence of Egyptian intentions towards Israel at that time, but it certainly exposed the feebleness of the Egyptian military apparatus. Nasser, it is said, found himself with a major political crisis fomented by his own young officers, who are the mainstay of his regime. They told him, in effect, that he had better get them guns no matter how or where, or they would find another leader who would. After the Czech offer was broached to Nasser, Soviet Ambassador Daniel Solod took pains to make sure that the officers should know about it too. Nasser had no choice after that but to accept, however disagreeable such intimacy with the Soviets might have seemed to him. Therefore, it is contended, the Gaza attack was a first-class Israeli political blunder. Before Gaza, Egypt's border was quiet and Israel had nothing to fear from her. Because of Gaza, Egypt became a confirmed and furious enemy backed by a limitless Soviet arsenal.

I AM concerned here not to refute the attitudes held in Cairo, but only to report them. Still, it should be recorded that Israel's attack on Gaza was not unprovoked. The Egyptian attitude up to that time had not been quite as bland as the Cairo foreign colony now recalls it. One may somehow pass off such demonstrations of Egyptian hostility as the Suez blockade (seizure of the Israeli freighter *Bat Galim* and its crew) or the excessive penalties meted out to muddleheaded "Zionist conspirators" (resulting in two suicides and two executions). But there was also a long succession of bloody border incursions on the part of the Egyptians—for purposes of sabotage, espionage,

and murder—often with formal military connivance or even participation, as the evidence shows. It is notorious by now that individual killings in the Arab manner, over an extended period, do not shock world opinion the way an efficient military operation in the Israeli manner does, which draws much blood in a single day. This is, in fact, a strong argument against the whole doctrine of mass retaliation. Nevertheless, an Israeli killed by infiltrators is no less dead than an Egyptian killed by organized attack.

After appeals to the Armistice Commission, the UN, and the great powers, what was Israel supposed to do in the face of persistent Egyptian provocation? When the question is privately put, the diplomatic observer has no positive answer. He can only point to the harm Israel did herself by doing what she did do. He alludes to Israel's unflagging demand that the Arabs negotiate with her; since Israel desperately needs Arab willingness to negotiate, he says, anything she does to make negotiations more remote and her opponents more intractable is manifestly against her own interests.

THE Egyptians, it is said, have suddenly shown a willingness to negotiate after all, but for wholly unexpected reasons. On no account were they prepared to parley from their position of weakness and humiliation after the Israeli war. But they appear quite ready now to parley from their new position of strength following the Czech deal. This presumably explains their affirmative reaction to Anthony Eden's Guildhall speech of November 9.

The British Prime Minister noted then that the Arabs "take their stand on the 1947 and other UN resolutions," the Israelis "on the Armistice Agreement of 1949 and on the present territories which they occupy." Sir Anthony took his stand on neither. He suggested that negotiations might "bridge" the "wide gap." He offered Britain's "help" and underscored that "if these nations want to win a peace which is in both their interests, they must make some compromise between these two positions."

There is some reason to believe that "Trieste" contacts have been begun with both sides, the British serving as chief broker, carrying messages in vast secrecy, seeking inch by arduous inch to bring the two adversaries toward the settlement which they both presumably desire. If so, it is curious that, for once, Israel and Egypt agreed on one thing from the outset: to misinterpret Eden's proposal. Ben Gurion rejected it as requiring Israel to cede virtually everything acquired after Partition—which Sir Anthony had scarcely implied. Nasser accepted it as confirming the demand that Israel must restore the 1947 *status quo ante bellum*—which Sir Anthony had explicitly denied. By misreading a simple text, Israel—which has always called for negotiations—put herself unnecessarily in the wrong by seeming to refuse them, and Egypt—which has always evaded negotiations—won much credit by seeming now to embrace them.

With comic unanimity the Egyptians have seized on something which Eden did not say—and to which they know Israel cannot agree—and have made their assent to it the proof of their own sweet reasonableness. Minister of National Guidance Fathi Radwan assured me that Egypt was asking nothing for herself. "All we want is for the UN and its prestige to be upheld. Israel can't go on disobeying the UN's 1947 decision and later decisions about refugees and Jerusalem. If she does, she proves her aggressive intentions. It's up to the Zionists to liquidate the factors of tension. Then peace becomes possible."

If Israel were to make these concessions, I asked Minister of State Sedat, what would the Egyptians concede? Why, he replied jauntily, Egypt was making a huge concession simply by being willing to talk. "Two years ago no Arab statesman would have dared. We are actually accepting Partition! We are saying to the Zionists that we are prepared to negotiate! That's what they've always wanted—and we're agreeing to it!"

According to the Political Under Secretary in the Foreign Ministry, M. al Labban, "we are even offering the possibility of rec-

ognizing Israel. The Zionists have to be accepted by the Arabs. Otherwise their state can have no permanent security." But, I inquired, what guarantee would they have that, once having yielded on all counts, they would not be attacked anyway? Ah, replied the Under Secretary, "they would just have to rely on Arab good faith."

A sign of this good faith was revealed by Nasser himself to a European journalist. When asked how Egypt could expect Israel to go back to Partition after the Egyptian army (and four others) had defied the same UN decision by invading Israel, the Prime Minister produced a remarkable feat of reasoning. The Arabs did not reject Partition—the British did; they failed in the Mandate's obligation to maintain peace; our Palestinian brothers were defenseless against Zionist aggression; we Egyptians intervened in order to *insure* Partition, to prevent the Zionists from overrunning *all* of Palestine! Then he went on piously: Egypt wishes to live amicably with a Jewish state, but first the Jews must give up the territory they won by aggressive war and take back the Arab refugees; the Zionists boast of absorbing three million Jews easily enough—so why can't they absorb the million Arabs who were there first?

Of all the Egyptian leaders I questioned, only one—Interior Minister Mokhialdin—was frank enough to indicate that "I personally am not too happy about settling for Partition. After all, why should the Zionists keep so much of the Negev?" Mokhialdin is very powerful, and close to Nasser.

EGYPT can afford to talk about negotiating on the basis of Partition because Israel cannot withdraw her capital from Jerusalem, surrender vital territories acquired in the course of repelling the invading Arab armies, and at the same time welcome hundreds of thousands of vengeful Palestinian Arabs within her shrunken frontiers. Indeed, if Israel were ever to call Egypt's bluff and agree to negotiate on the basis of Partition, Egypt would be marvelously disconcerted. She would thereby be thwarted—at least

temporarily—of her real aim: Israel's total disappearance.

Egypt thinks there are two good reasons for believing such a happy solution as the complete elimination of Israel entirely possible. The first is the presumed effectiveness of boycott and blockade. It used to be said by friends of Israel that fear of beneficial Jewish impact on the economies and social structures of the Arab states was the real motive for the anti-Zionism of the Arab feudalists. Well, the feudalists are gone from Egypt, but what the new reformers there dread is lest peace give Israel opportunity to prosper, conquer Arab markets at home and abroad, and *block* Arab development instead of spurring it. As long as the boycott continues, Israeli competition is no threat. (The same calculation is widespread here in Lebanon; Beirut has replaced Haifa and Lydda as the Levant's major harbor and airport.) Apart from doing the Arabs good, according to the Egyptian thesis, the iron ring around Israel is doing Israel much harm. The blockade at Suez and Eylath, the severance of the oil pipeline to Haifa, the separation of Israel from her natural hinterland—all these promise her slow but sure strangulation. It does not matter, Egyptians tell you, that it may take long. The Crusaders established themselves in the heart of the Arab world and held out for generations, but where is the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem today?

The second source of Egyptian belief in the practical possibility of Israel's extinction is new and magnificent. Egypt has lately discovered the joys of diplomatic blackmail. She—and the Arab world with her—has noted the brilliant effect of the Czech arms deal on the West. Nothing has given the Arab Middle East more satisfaction in a long time than Nasser's coup. Never has there been such exhilaration, such confidence—and such arrogance. The rewards to be gotten from further turns of the screw are seen as limitless. What has been done once can be more easily done again. The Soviet bugaboo is a miraculous device for the contentment of Arab appetite. It is be-

ing counted on to extort concession after further concession. What folly it would be, then, to make terms with Israel just when the prospects of growing mightier at her cost have been so vividly revealed!

AS YET, the unhappy West does not appear to have evolved any effective ideas on how to cope with this situation. Curiously, the Egyptians fear a challenge to their new-found cockiness much less from Britain or America than from Israel.

I do not here mean the habitual Egyptian charge of Israeli "imperialism." I mean something infinitely deeper and realer: the Arab inferiority complex towards Israel. There is in Egypt a holy dread, not so much of Israel's intentions, as of Israel's capabilities. Nowhere is there profounder respect for the Israeli fighting man than in the Arab world, and nowhere more than in Egypt. The Cairo junta is haunted by the thought that its dangerous game between East and West may be called by the Jewish state.

That is why Nasser and his press clamor daily against Western arms for Israel—even purely defensive ones. The list of weapons Israel desires to purchase from the United States "to counteract" the Czech jet-bombers and other deadly weapons, cried the *Egyptian Gazette*, "covers a wide range including anti-tank, anti-aircraft and anti-submarine equipment." Such a "vast" rearmament program, continued the *Gazette*, "would only

encourage Israel to perpetrate further aggressions on the Arab states!"

Such frenetic dread—considering the offensive nature of the Czech arms received by Egypt and the defensive nature of the American arms desired by Israel—only illuminates the humble opinion the Egyptians have of their own military prowess. In Cairo salons I even heard lugubrious speculation that the Soviet arms shipments endanger Egypt: "It only leaves more stuff around for the Israelis to capture!" Such is the elaborate respect the Egyptians have for Israel's ability—provided she obtains something to defend herself with—to knock Egypt squarely on the head at a given moment. The Egyptians' fondest hope is to stay so far ahead in arms, and keep Israel so far behind, that she will not dare to attack. On my last night in Cairo, strolling back to my hotel with an Egyptian captain who had somehow escaped being briefed by Colonel Hatem about my "Zionist" background, I asked him what he thought of Egypt's chances in a showdown fight with Israel. "Small," he said despondently. "They have eighty thousand trained soldiers. And another one hundred thousand they can mobilize. And what fanatics, those Israelis!"

[This is the first of a series of reports by Mr. Lehrman on Israel and the Middle East. He has just arrived in Israel after completing a tour of five Arab countries.]